



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

# Marker training 2007

*National curriculum assessments monitoring report*

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## Executive summary

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is the regulator of external qualifications and national curriculum assessments in England, and is committed to securing a fair deal for learners. The Regulation and Standards division of QCA regulates the national curriculum assessments produced by the National Assessment Agency (NAA), a subsidiary of QCA, against a regulatory framework and code of practice.

This report presents the findings of QCA's monitoring of the 2007 national curriculum test marker training meetings and shows the following.

- The training meetings were broadly compliant with the requirements of the *Code of practice*<sup>1</sup> and a great deal of good practice was seen.
- There were some issues in terms of compliance with the *Code of practice* in the areas of:
  - provision and support for new markers
  - training markers in procedures for the level setting exercise, national script sampling and borderlining.

QCA does not consider that this non-compliance affected the overall quality of marker training. Details are given in Section 1 of this report.

There were some other observations made during the monitoring process that the NAA should consider when undertaking any future development of marker training. Details are given in Section 2 of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> *National curriculum assessments: Code of practice* (QCA/07/2828) was published in January 2007 and is available on the QCA website: [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk).

# Introduction

## Regulating national curriculum assessments

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is the regulator of external qualifications and national curriculum assessments in England, and is committed to securing a fair deal for learners. National curriculum assessments are used to assess pupils' attainment in English and mathematics at key stages 1, 2 and 3, and science at key stages 2 and 3. The results of these assessments are used to indicate the level of attainment of individual pupils and, when aggregated, the level of performance of schools and local authorities in England. QCA is responsible for ensuring that the assessments are a fair and effective measure of pupils' achievement and that standards are maintained over time.

The National Assessment Agency (NAA), a subsidiary of QCA, is responsible for the production and delivery of national curriculum assessments. QCA has established performance expectations that define the quality of service that the NAA must provide. These expectations are published in a detailed code of practice, *National curriculum assessments: Code of practice*.<sup>2</sup> QCA monitors and reports on the performance of the NAA against these expectations and requirements.

## An overview of the marking process

After pupils have taken key stage 2 and 3 tests, schools send the scripts to be marked by an external marker. For each key stage and subject approximately 600,000 pupils' scripts are marked, by about 1,600 markers.

The NAA is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate programme is in place for recruiting and training these markers. To fulfil this responsibility it appoints a test operations agency that must develop a training programme that trains markers to apply the mark scheme consistently and in line with the agreed national standard. The training programme must also ensure that markers fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

The marker training programme for 2007 followed a cascade model that has been developed over several years. There are variations between the training required for marking at different key stages and for different subjects, but each programme usually includes eight meetings. Typically, one marking programme leader manages and trains four or five deputy marking programme leaders, who each manage and train four or five senior markers. Each senior

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<sup>2</sup> *National curriculum assessments: Code of practice* (QCA/07/2828) was published in January 2007 and is available on the QCA website: [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk).

marker is responsible for 10 team leaders, who in turn manage and train a team of 10 markers. Thus, training cascades from the marking programme leader to all markers.

The marking programme leader has overall responsibility for developing the training materials. These materials are reviewed at a series of early meetings with the deputy marking programme leaders. If necessary, amendments are made to the materials to ensure that they adequately exemplify the agreed mark scheme and cover the full range of levels.

Senior markers are then trained to mark and to supervise other markers, after which they train their group of team leaders in the same skills. At the last stage of training in the cascade, team leaders train markers at a range of venues around the country, all on the same day. The aim of this model is to disseminate important messages and consistent training from the senior marking personnel to all markers.

## Monitoring the marking cascade

For 2007 the Regulation and Standards division's national curriculum assessments monitoring team chose to maintain its 2006 approach to monitoring the annual marker training programme. One complete marker training cascade was monitored, along with a sample of meetings from other key stages and subjects. The key stage 2 English marker training cascade was selected as the focus for monitoring in 2007.

The national curriculum assessments monitoring team monitored every stage in the key stage 2 English cascade. The later meetings, where team leaders were receiving training, involved large numbers of people with training taking place in several different rooms. Monitors sampled 20 per cent of the rooms for the 'training to mark' meeting and 80 per cent for the 'training to supervise' meeting. Seven of the 17 final key stage 2 English marker training meetings, held at different venues throughout England, were monitored.

A sample of meetings taking place from the middle to the end of the training process in other subjects and key stages was also monitored. The numbers of meetings that were monitored are shown in Table 1.

Each meeting was monitored against the 2007 *Code of practice*. Monitors did not become involved in meetings but used a pre-agreed list of questions to collect evidence of compliance with the *Code of practice*, as well as to record other observations.

Table 1: Marker training meetings attended

	Meeting description	Number of key stage 2 English meetings attended	Number of other key stage / subject meetings attended
January	Review of training materials	1	-
February	Training deputy marking programme leaders to mark	1	-
	Training deputy marking programme leaders to train	1	-
	Training senior markers to mark	1	1
March	Training senior markers to supervise	1	3
April	Training team leaders to mark	1 (two monitors)	-
May	Training team leaders to supervise	1 (four monitors)	3
	All marker training	7	3

## Section 1: Compliance with the *Code of practice*

The meetings were found to be broadly compliant with the requirements of the *Code of practice* and a great deal of good practice was seen, particularly in the communication to markers of the importance of consistent application of the mark scheme.

Paragraph 212 of the *Code of practice* states: 'The training programme for each key stage and subject must... consider any issues raised by, or recommendations from, the evaluations of the previous year's training programme'.

In key stage 2 English there was evidence that improvements had been made, with a number of changes, which had been requested by the marking programme leader in her 2006 end-of-cycle report, implemented by the test operations agency. For example, the reading test training had been restructured by assessment focus,<sup>3</sup> to target those assessment focuses thought to be more difficult to mark.

### Non-compliance with the *Code of practice*

Paragraph 214 of the *Code of practice* states: 'New markers must be identified and receive appropriate training before they start live marking and mentor support throughout the marking period'. In addition, paragraph 31 states: 'The test operations agency appointed to mark the test papers must... ensure that all new markers are fully supported through additional training and the provision of a mentor'. Although the training for markers was of a high standard overall, monitors found that standards were less secure in the arrangements made for markers who were new to marking national curriculum tests.

At some of the final cascade meetings support staff from the test operations agency told monitors that they were unable to identify new markers due to an IT problem. However, in these and other meetings, team leaders were aware of which markers were new and it appeared that all had phoned their teams in advance to obtain this information.

The test operations agency sent additional tailored materials to all new markers in advance of training, and monitors saw a lot of good practice from team leaders in engaging all markers during the meetings. However, there was no additional face-to-face training for new markers. Team leaders explained to monitors that they had seated each new marker with someone more experienced, but this mentor role was not consistently defined.

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<sup>3</sup> For guidance on assessment focuses for reading visit the QCA website at [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_5631.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5631.aspx).

Paragraph 213 of the *Code of practice* states: 'The training programme must be designed so that all markers... understand their involvement in the marking process, including those aspects that affect the script scrutiny and level setting procedures'.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, paragraph 245 of the *Code of practice* states: 'Markers must be trained to carry out the borderlining process'.<sup>5</sup> However, monitors reported only a few instances of trainers referring to the procedures for national script sampling<sup>6</sup> and the level setting exercise data capture.<sup>7</sup> At several of the monitored meetings there was no evidence of borderlining advice or training being given to markers. All these procedures are laid out in the markers' handbook, which markers receive before their first training meeting, but there was no evidence of this being consistently reinforced at the meetings.

In response to this observation the NAA stated that the supervision structure for all markers is established and that markers are actively encouraged to contact their supervisor for further explanation and training. Furthermore, the NAA reinforced the purpose of borderlining in the instructions sent to markers with the level thresholds in June 2007.

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<sup>4</sup> Level setting is the process by which the level thresholds for the tests are determined. Part of this process is script scrutiny which gives an indication of what the level thresholds should be through the comparison of past scripts with current scripts.

<sup>5</sup> Borderlining is the process of checking the scripts of pupils whose marks are just below the level threshold, to ensure that the correct level is awarded.

<sup>6</sup> National script sampling is the process by which scripts are obtained for script scrutiny.

<sup>7</sup> Data obtained from markers in the level setting exercise are used to give an indication of how the thresholds set will be reflected nationally.



## Section 2: Other observations

Further important observations from the monitoring programme are discussed in this section. Although these findings do not relate directly to compliance with the *Code of practice*, they are still valuable in supporting the continued improvement of marker training.

### Administration and management of the marker training events

Monitors reported that the meetings were well organised. The venues and facilities were suitable for the purposes of all of the meetings that were monitored. Test operations agency staff were available at meetings and well prepared to deal with administrative queries.

It was clear that all senior marking personnel had received the training materials and exercises in advance, and had been provided with other information such as joining instructions and terms of reference for the marker training programme. This was an improvement on the findings of monitors in 2006.

The *Code of practice* requires that feedback be collected after training events so that it can be used to improve future years' training programmes. While feedback was collected at a number of marker training events, it was not clear from test operations agency staff how this feedback would be used.

### Robustness of the training programme

Markers reported that the quality of marker training materials was better than that of previous years and that the materials were fit for their purpose. Monitors found that the materials were used effectively in training.

There was evidence that all monitored supervisory marking personnel had completed their preparation in advance of meetings and had submitted their training script marks to their own supervisors, who used this information to help target the training sessions to the strengths and weaknesses of the team. However, at the final marker training meetings there were a few instances of markers not having completed their preparatory marking. In accordance with the test operations agency's guidelines, each senior marker present at these meetings used their professional judgement to determine whether these markers should continue with the training. In some cases it was possible to arrange separate or additional training for them on the day.

From team leaders' training onwards, the venue and meeting structure meant that it was not possible for senior marking personnel to give a plenary session where they could discuss the purpose of the day and deliver key messages about professionalism, confidentiality, changes to marking procedures, and the importance of team leaders and markers to the training and

marking process. At final cascade meetings some key messages were presented to markers on an A4 sheet and briefly covered by each team leader. However, a plenary session would guarantee the communication of consistent messages to markers from the test operations agency and senior marking personnel, as well as offer an opportunity for questions and feedback.

For 2007 the test operations agency developed a distance-learning module to cover most aspects of marking administration. Markers were asked to complete this before the training day and team leaders then went through the answers in the meeting. Markers generally welcomed this innovation. However, the amount of time spent by team leaders on administrative training was inconsistent and in some meetings there was information that was either rushed or not given at all. In general, the administrative training provided at meetings did not appear as strong as the training on the application of the mark scheme.

The purpose of the 'training to supervise' meetings for team leaders is to train them to manage others effectively. The monitoring showed that the content of these meetings varied between different teams. And these meetings were primarily used as a further opportunity to answer team leaders' queries relating to the mark scheme and training commentary, instead of focusing on training team leaders to manage and supervise their teams of markers, and on how to deal with issues relating to sampling and marking quality.

## Section 3: Conclusions and implications for future regulation

### Compliance

The meetings attended were broadly compliant with the requirements of the *Code of practice*. Overall, key stage 2 English was found to have a robust training programme with a large resource of experienced, committed and professional marking personnel. There are just two issues in terms of compliance:

- the provision of training and support for new markers
- the reinforcement in meetings of the information and guidance in the markers' handbook about scripts for the level setting exercise, national script sampling and borderlining.

### Issues requiring action by the National Assessment Agency

In light of the two issues of compliance identified above, the NAA should review the format of training in regard to new markers and the important procedures surrounding the marking process.

Written material for new markers is valuable, but team leaders need to be absolutely sure that new markers are confident in applying the mark scheme and performing necessary administrative tasks. Additional targeted training would be the most secure way of ensuring this.

Similarly, the markers' handbook is very useful, but training must also be used to ensure that all markers are able to carry out procedures such as the level setting exercise and national script sampling. The training agenda must ensure that the tasks and responsibilities surrounding marking are properly covered, without diminishing the mark scheme training.

### Improvements and minor issues

As part of continuous improvement the NAA should also consider the observations made in Section 2 of this report. There are many examples of good practice, which the NAA should strive to maintain. While the points made in Section 2 do not require a direct response from the NAA, further targeting of training will ensure that all trainers and markers are aware of the full range of their roles and responsibilities.

### Future regulation of marker training

QCA is satisfied that the approach used to monitor marker training in 2007 was targeted and effective. By following the complete marker training cascade for one key stage subject, QCA

has improved regulatory confidence in the development of training materials and the cascade process.

In 2008 the NAA will employ a new test operations agency. To ensure that standards are maintained QCA will monitor the transition between agencies and will target monitoring of 2008 marker training in light of the new agency's proposed changes to the marker training programme. Current proposals are that while training to mark English will remain face to face, training to mark mathematics and science will be done online. In all three subjects, however, new markers will receive face-to-face training. As a result of these changes the programme of monitoring will focus on mathematics and science, including the training of new markers. The finalised monitoring programme for 2008 will be shared with the NAA in due course.